9: Evans K-5 (ca.1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

241 412 toil and grazing, by plough and spade, hoof and muzzle, have Ireland's green fields been "moulded."

Fig. 48.

Although we cannot touch on the other crops and have given a very inadequate idea of the bustle, worries and humours of the Irish springtime, when all the crops demand to be put in the ground at the same time, we must end this chapter with a few comments on the growing season. The general practice when thinning root crops is to work on the [516] knees with the hands: one rarely sees a hoe being used for thinning. Yet paradoxically corn is weeded, if it gets any attention at all, with a pair of wooden pincers or thistle-pullers, called, in Co. Antrim, "clips" (Fig. 48). This tool is already [184] mentioned in a Tour of Ireland in 1752. The weeders are not so common in the south of the country and are fitted with iron pincers in some counties. Another home-made device once familiar in the north was the crow-scarer or "corn-crake," a noisy instrument made on the principle of the watchman's rattle or—to give a modern instance—the gas rattle of the A.R.P. services.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Aran Islands

Plate V.

285
516
291
351

MAKING A SKIB
INISHERE, ARAN
CREEL IN GROUND BEHIND

[facing p. 120]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

352 admirably illustrates the economy of space and function characteristic of Irish kitchen fittings, but I doubt whether this rather complicated piece of furniture is of any great antiquity: it was probably introduced by planters or adapted from a settle fitted with a coffer seat.

The black-houses, as described in the nineteenth century, had no table, and there are still to be seen, in Donegal for instance, houses where there is no kitchen table. At meal-times [264] the family sit around a shallow potato basket resting on the circle of knees. The origin of the tripod tray-table of south-eastern Europe and south-western Asia is surely to be sought in a similar custom. In fact the Blasket Island table was described as a tripod to which was fitted a board which hung on the wall when not in use.[1] The little round table is known from many parts of western Europe. There is, for example, the three-legged 'cricket' table of Wales, which has a special place in the affections of the family. Placed near the fire, it is reserved at meal-times for the father and mother while the children and servants eat at the big table. In Ireland the kitchen table is a flimsy construction, and its place is against the side wall, under a window. Not infrequently it is hinged to the wall as a 'falling leaf table' which drops when not in use, thus enlarging the open space in front of the fire.

Bishop Pococke describes the Tirawley (Mayo) table as 'a long sort of stool about 20 inches high and broad and two yards long',[2] clearly designed to be stowed away along a wall. Small tables which have been found in the bogs are little more than small boards, their four short legs being cut from the solid. They are provided with holes by which they could be transported or hung up when not in use (Fig. 26). It follows that table-chairs were unnecessary: long, low, narrow stools or three [516] legged 'creepies' would serve, and the children would have squatted eastern-fashion on the floor.

352 592 The table, therefore, in the words of a Swedish student of Irish ethnology, 'never attracted the social activities of the house, and there are no ceremonies connected with the places at the table, as in countries where the table is the predominating

[1] T. O'Crohan, *The Islandman* (1934), 40.
[2] *Pococke's Tour, 1752* (1891), 87.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Antrim

PLATE 6

243
516
291
412

1. Shearing oats with the toothed sickle, Co. Antrim.

291
342
351
243
412

2. Threshing oats with flails, Co. Antrim.

[facing p. 97]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Fermanagh
County Antrim

PLATE 9

314
516
493
291
412

1. Cutting turf (underfooting) in a Co. Fermanagh bog.

314
417
493
291

2. Building a peat stack, Co. Antrim.

[FACING p.144]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Meath

PLATE 10

314
291
[412]

1. Spreading mud turf with long-handled shovel, Co. Meath.

[516]

2. "Running" the spread turf.

[FACING p. 145]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

stranger was accosted and held down on the ground, a woman would lie on top of him and another woman would tumble them over.[1] Such horse-play was more than a consequence of the high spirits of harvest, the 'rural saturnalia' described by Richard Jefferies in *The Toilers of the Field*. Displays of the rites and symbols of fertility were closely bound up with the bounty of harvest. 243

There were many variations in the methods of reaping, or shearing—to use the old term—depending on the type of hook, which might be smooth or notched, on the width of the ridges, the condition of the crop and so on. The toothed sickle is probably the older implement, going back to the time when iron was a new metal and could not be given a sharp steel edge. Whereas the smooth or scythe hook is wielded with a slashing cut which may spill the grain, especially of rye, if the crop is ripe and the edge not kept very keen, the sickle is pulled towards the shearer, who holds each bunch as it is cut, pressing it back into the standing corn. As a rule three handfuls or 'loghters' go to each sheaf, the bands of which are prepared beforehand and laid out for the reaper to place the loghters on them straight from the hook (Pl. 6, 1). [412]

The term shearing implies that the crop was cut close to the ground as wool is clipped from a sheep, and indeed urban officials have been known to confuse the operations. Pride was taken in a stubble-field that looked as if it had been shaved. 'Low and clean' was the injunction, 'cut it down to the living earth!' 'Down with the head and up with the tail' were my instructions when I lent a hand at harvest in the Glens of Antrim. Mercifully one worked uphill: where the land was level the reaper would go down on one knee, wearing a knee-pad. If the ridges were wide there might be two shearers and one binder to each ridge, the shearers working from the furrows on each side, the depth of which minimized the amount of stooping required. A 'crack hooksman' could reap and tie fifty twelve-sheaf stooks a day, or say an Irish acre (= 1¾ English acres). It is necessary to have worked with a gang of reapers to appreciate the relentless pace of the work and at the same time the care with which every operation is carried out. There must be no [516]

[1] M. Banks, *British Calendar Customs*, Scotland, I (1937).

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

582 621 593 three sisters, and ten of two—and they tend to visit together often and lend mutual economic and emotional support.

591 428 342 822 776 When a man marries, his parents relinquish the holding, and its direction passes into the hands of the newlyweds. Arensberg and Kimball talk of the "west room" complex, which may exist in many parts of peasant Ireland but does not in Inis Beag. Houses in north and west Co. Clare "with remarkable uniformity" are aligned east and west, and on the son's marriage the old couple moves into the westernmost room "behind the hearth." This room is linked with the Celtic supernatural, for fairy paths are thought to be located along the western side of many houses, and the pagan afterworld—the Isle of the Blest—is a sunken land mass in the nearby western sea (Arensberg and Kimball 1940:134–136). In Inis Beag, on the contrary, over one-third of the domiciles since 1841 have been aligned north and south, fairy trails are found mostly at the back of the island, and a retiring couple may choose any of three rooms (or more in modern homes) to move into. The west room of Co. Clare is called simply "the room" in Inis Beag.

342 [198] [177] [657] Thirty-four of the 71 inhabited buildings in the island have thatched roofs (see Fig. 8), while the others are antiquated houses which lately have been renovated, mainly by replacing thatch with slate, or are newly built. The last of the traditional "cabins" or "cottages" were constructed in the 1930s, and the first of the modern ones during the 1890s—with two stories initially, and styled and subsidized by the Congested Districts Board. Old and renovated houses are rectangular in shape, are constructed of whitewashed stones with concrete floors, and have a large central kitchen with doors or half-doors to the outside both front and back. "The room" is beyond the kitchen at one end of the building, and two bedrooms (one in the most ancient cabins) are at the other. Lofts for sleeping are in the gable of the roof above "the room" and bedrooms, and are entered by ladder [372] or staircase from the kitchen. Fireplaces share a common wall and chimney between the kitchen and "the room," as they also may between the two bedrooms; but the kitchen hearth is the most used, and in some homes is not permitted to die out.

351 [343] [244] The space between the cottage and the low stone wall and outbuildings surrounding it is called the "street." Outbuildings at the back include a toilet and various storage sheds—for spuds and turf sods in particular, although the latter often are stacked instead against a gable of the cabin. In a portion of the street or a small field beyond the wall, a garden for vegetables is maintained for easy access.

342 [262] [264] [415] [778] [352] The kitchen doors of the house sometimes open into small halls in the front or back, or both, and when the weather is not too cold or blustery, the door opening to the street on the windward side is kept closed and its opposite open. In the kitchen, which is the center of family activities, are: the fireplace at which cooking is done with pot and cooking ovens hung from an iron hook; the table around which the family eats their five daily meals; the sideboard, known as a "dresser," filled with "delph"—both everyday and "best" china; the religious shrine with "blessed lamp" surrounded by religious pictures and sacred objects; and, occasionally, a "settlebed" which, when closed, serves as a bench during the daytime.

354 [352] [516] [593] [178] The hearth in the kitchen is indented into the wall to provide two hobs, or seats, and on a chilly or dampish day the folk will nestle inside the fireplace and sit tightly together on a bench drawn up close to the turf fire for warmth. This

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

764
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516

Figure 11. Praying at the graveside of an islander

764

grave by the two diggers who have leaped into the hole. After the priest has thrown three shovelfuls of dirt on the coffin, the grave is filled in rapidly by the diggers, and the close kin of the deceased and the pallbearers gather around the priest to recite a final Rosary. Those who did not visit the graves of relatives when entering the cemetery do so as they depart. Some graves remain unmarked following the funeral; others are marked with a wooden cross or uninscribed slab of local limestone; while still others have placed over them engraved headstones purchased on the mainland. Several large, flat tombstones dating back over a century cover members of particular families buried atop one another as sand accumulated.

[211]

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Twice a year, Inis Beag is visited for a day by the parish priest and a curate, who join the local curate to celebrate special masses, called "the stations" ("the confessions" in Irish), in two homes and in the church. Homes are chosen in such a manner that each of the four villages is represented every year, and each home in the island is so honored every 16 to 22 years. For weeks in advance of the stations, both families are hard at work cleaning, painting, and repairing their houses and surrounding streets, fences, and outbuildings in preparation for the event. Confessions are heard by the three priests the night before, and holy water is sprinkled by them in the streets and on the outbuildings near the two houses as a blessing prior to the masses at nine o'clock in the morning. Stations in the homes are conducted by the visiting clerics and in the chapel by the Inis Beag curate, and the folk are free to attend any one of the three services. Following the masses, the priests and the three local teachers are entertained at breakfast in the chosen homes, after which the sacrament is carried to those who are confined. The families involved look forward eagerly to the event, for the stations are believed to bring them luck and "to drive out the 'big fellow' for a long time." It also forces them

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